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Temporary Exhibition from the Johnson Collection

IN THE month of March of this year the Art Jury of the City of Philadelphia decided that some public exhibition should be made of the valuable and important collection of paintings left to the city by the late John G. Johnson which, since his death have been stored for safe keeping, inasmuch as the Art Jury and the Trustees of the Johnson estate had decided, with eminent wisdom, that his house in South Broad street was in every sense unfitted for their proper preservation.

There is unfortunately no place in the city where so large a collection (nearly 1300 paintings besides sculpture and other art objects) can be exhibited in its entirety; so the jury decided to clear the Central Gallery of the Wiltach wing of the Pennsylvania Museum and arrange in it temporary exhibitions of some of the Johnson pictures.

On March 10 sixty-two Italian paintings of the XIV to the XVI centuries were shown for the first time to their owners, the people of Philadelphia.

Their interest in their new possessions was promptly manifested in the largely increased attendance; no fewer than 137,852 persons visited the Museum between March 10 and June 6, when this exhibition was replaced by another consisting of sixty-one modern pictures—French and American.

The peculiar importance of the Johnson Collection consists in its catholicity; no school and few masters, a knowledge of whose work is essential to the study of the art of painting, are unrepresented in this large collection.

It is not to be expected that all should be of the first or even of equal excellence, although there is a more than creditable showing of masterpieces; but it is safe to say that nowhere on this side of the Atlantic and in very few European galleries may a student familiarize himself with the style and methods of so many of the old and modern masters.

As is well known to connoisseurs, Mr. Johnson's personal taste was for those rarer and, in a sense, esoteric painters who were the fathers of their art in all European lands and are generally called "the Primitives"; his collection is therefore peculiarly strong in their works.

It was considered, however, that these would prove of less general interest than the works of later and more technically matured artists. Consequently the exhibition of Italian paintings comprised few pictures of the XIV century. Of those of the XV, because of their individual importance there were rather more. Foremost among these, and one of the gems of the collection, was the exquisite little Madonna and Child with Sts. John Baptist and Jerome, by Francesco



NIGHTFALL
Jean Baptiste Camille Corot

Pesellino, a very jewel of delicate feeling and workmanship and most fortunately in a marvelous state of preservation, almost entirely free from restorations.

It must never be forgotten, in examining any collection of old paintings, that these are in their very essence fragile and perishable in the extreme, that in the four or five hundred years of their existence they have been exposed to risks innumerable and have in many cases suffered from such exposure, lastly, that in being brought to this country they have been torn from, what one may call, their natural surroundings, in which they were painted and to which they have acclimatized themselves, to be exposed to very different conditions of temperature and humidity, as a result of which sadly too many of them suffer disintegration and decay.

Almost as important as the Pesellino are the very early *predelle* pictures of the life of Mary Magdalene by Botticelli, which it is believed, came from an altarpiece in the Convertite at Florence. Their delicious naiveté gives them high rank, despite their minuteness, among the works of the master.

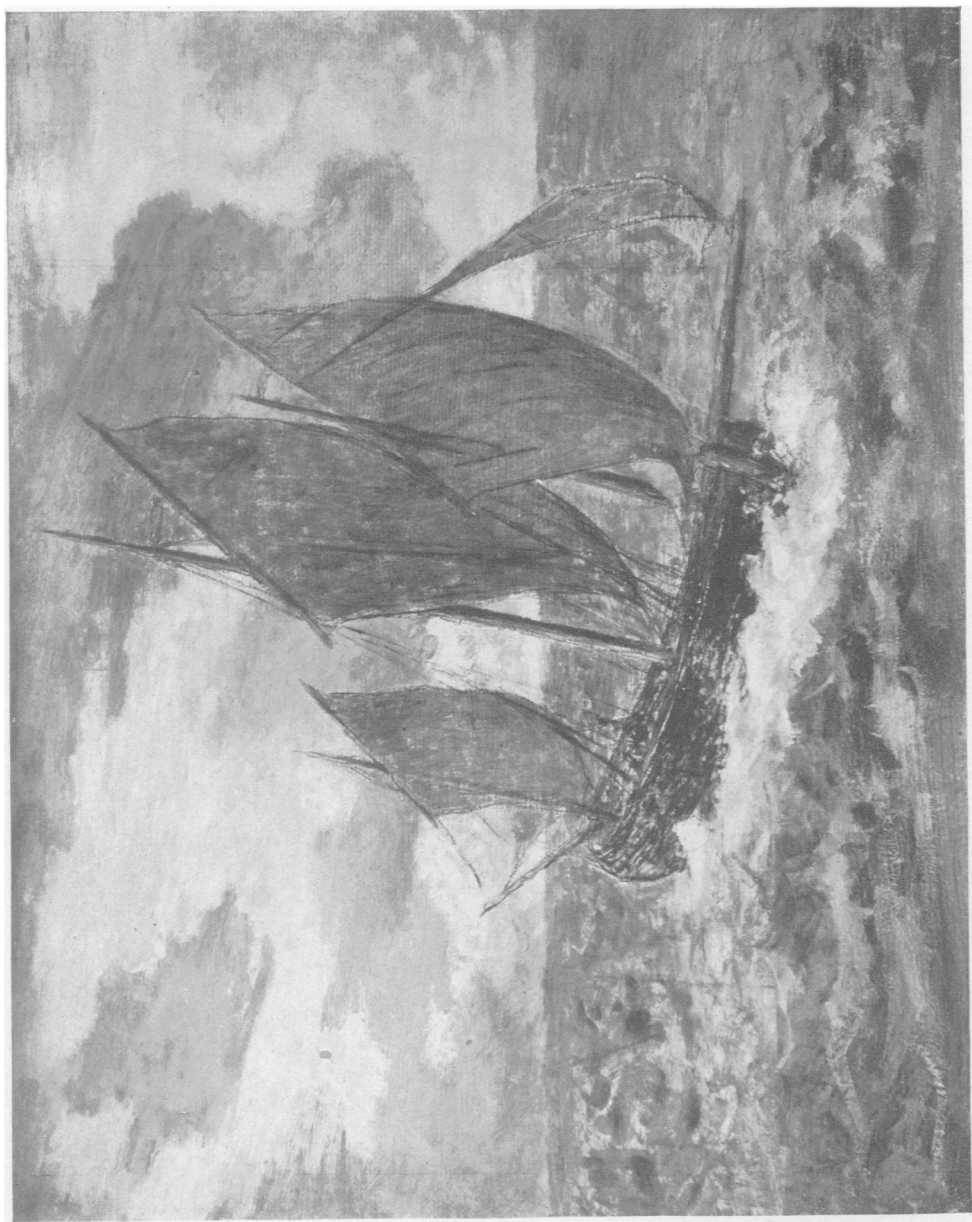
A wonderfully brilliant little "Purification of the Blessed Virgin," by Enozzo Gozzoli, is another treasure of Florentine primitive painting.

A curious and historically most interesting painting is "Adam and Eve," by Fra Bartolommeo. This very sketch is mentioned and described in the deed of dissolution of partnership between the Frate and Mariotto Albertinelli in January 1512. Its artistic interest consists in its unfinished state; in places it is only begun, thus exhibiting to the student all the stages of the processes whereby the old Italian masters obtained their effects.

Of the Venetian primitives two, among several, call for notice; a superb, though most painful, "Pieta," by Carlo Crivelli, and a portrait of The Blessed Lorenzo Giustiniani, first Patriarch of Venice, by the elder and rarer of the two great Bellini brothers, Gentile. This painting has unfortunately suffered so greatly at the hand of time that it is impossible to decide whether or not it is from the hand of the master himself, or a studio copy of his well-known portrait of the Blessed Patriarch now in the Academy at Venice. There is also a fine head of an old man by Alvise Vivarini.

Two works from the studio of Mantegna and one from that of Cosimo Tura, possess merits that almost justify us in ascribing them to their respective masters; undoubtedly they were executed under their eyes.

The pictures of the great fresco painter, Luca Signorelli, are so seldom met with in Galleries, and his importance in the development of art in Italy is so great that all four of his paintings belonging to the Johnson Collection were placed on exhibition. Their historical value is perhaps greater than their aesthetic, but they did not lack this last, particularly a very charming and dramatic "Nativity."



A FAIR WIND
Jean Francois Millet

A most attractive profile of a Milanese lady is certainly by one of the close followers of Leonardo da Vinci and most probably by Ambrogio da Predis. Another study for a woman's head has more of the manner of Luini.

A very beautiful Madonna and Child is typically characteristic of another less slavish follower of Leonardo, Sodoma.

Coming to the masters of the high Renaissance we find a portrait of a gentleman of the Bardocini family, the only dated work in existence that can safely be ascribed to Palma Vecchio.

A work of nearly the highest order, romantic in the landscape, monumental in composition and convincingly full of character in the portraiture, is a Holy Family with Donors which it is at present impossible to ascribe otherwise than as Venetian of about 1530; when it was in the Leuchtenberg Collection, from which Mr. Johnson acquired it, it was given to Moroni: it has strong suggestions of Lotto; the discovery of the painter will be a pleasant task for students of the collection.

In selecting these sixty-two pictures for exhibition no attempt was made to show only the best of the 350 Italian paintings in the Johnson Collection, though as may be seen there was a fair sprinkling of such. The intention was to present a good average of the examples by which the merit of the whole might be gauged; that this average was a very high one was obvious to the visitor; when the time comes for the exhibition of the entire collection many another treasure remains to be disclosed.

The sixty-one modern paintings now on exhibition in the Wilstach Gallery are mostly, as might be expected, French.

The earliest of them are by Barye, the great animal sculptor, Courbet, Couture, Decamps, and the rare painter, Daumier.

Of the Barbizon School, Daubigny, Diaz, Dupré, Rousseau and Troyon are well represented. Millet and Corot, the great luminaries of the same period, are given prominence, the first by four, the latter by seven examples.

Two of the Millets are pastel, the larger of which, "A Goatherd Girl," is among his important works in this medium. The largest of his pictures on exhibition is a rather unusual subject for him, a fishing vessel scudding before a fair wind in a rising sea; hardly more than a sketch, it is vigorously laid in and full of movement.

The most important as well as the most attractive of the Corots is "Nightfall" with its glowing sunset, roused by which a beast of prey steals forth from its forest lair to "walk in darkness." There are two or three in Corot's more familiar manner and one most interesting early work, which at first glance no one would take to be his.

The modern successors of the Dutch Little Masters also attracted Mr. Johnson. There is a very fine "Bridge" by Jacob Maris, together with two other smaller but characteristic paintings of his. Israels,



THE LADY OF THE LANG LIJSEN
James McNeill Whistler

Jonkind, Matthew Maris and the Belgian, Alfred Stevens, are also represented.

A characteristic early Bastien-LePage, a portrait of the artist's wife in Breton peasant costume, recalls his famous portraits of Sarah Bernhardt and King Edward VII. By Dagnan-Bouveret is a less usual picture of the Thames below London with shipping.

By Manet is an extraordinary and most unusual picture, "The Sinking of the Alabama by the Kearsarge," the historical interest of which (if it was painted from actual observation) exceeds any other.

Of what were in Mr. Johnson's day The Ultra-Moderns—the Impressionists, Raffaelli with three examples, Monet, Sisley, Simon, are all to be found.

Carrière, Besnard and Henri Martin have each of them a head in their respective well-known manners.

Two paintings by Puvis de Chavannes are certain to attract attention both by their dissimilarity to his later style, in which are painted the well-known decorations in the Boston Public Library and those, still more famous, in the Sorbonne and the Pantheon at Paris. They are two of the original studies for the four great decorative panels in the Musée de Picardie at Amiens and were painted in his earliest manner. They symbolically represent "Peace and War." The other two are in the Widener Collection.

Coming to the American artists, Inness is represented by two small thoroughly characteristic landscapes.

An interesting early Sargent, of the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris, is a cool study of twilight with a rising moon. There is also one of Sargent's amazingly brilliant and dexterous water-colors, "A Venetian Interior."

By Whistler are two pictures which, together with the well-known "Yellow Buskin" in the adjoining Wilstach Gallery, give a complete synthesis of the work of this great American painter. The little "Nocturne" on the Thames at Battersea belongs to the same period or manner as the "Yellow Buskin"; the other, "The Lady of the Lang Lijsen," is of a much earlier period, 1864, not long after his return from his studentship in Paris, and shows him most interestingly, delighting in gay, even bright color, and exhibiting a more conventional treatment of light and shade than he afterward employed.

HAMILTON BELL.